

Supervisor FRONTLINE

A newsletter from the WA State Employee Assistance Program

Questions



What can supervisors do to encourage employees to practice wellness? I know this isn't a supervisor's responsibility; however, supervisors have clout and influence, and I think we should put it to good use to help people.



Why is change, even when it's a good change, such a difficult thing for employees? What can be done in advance to reduce resistance or conflict when a change is introduced?

Answers



You can prompt employees to be healthier without crossing boundaries. Start by understanding what constitutes healthful behaviors, and then spot opportunities to practice these and encourage others to do so too. Orient your personal leadership style to value wellness. For example, do you encourage taking work breaks? Do staff members feel comfortable going for a walk or stretching at break time? Do you orient new employees to your personal philosophy of work-life balance and maintaining a healthy lifestyle? Can you permit flextime so employees can participate in wellness activities? Consider placing wellness topics, even for a few minutes, on the agenda for your meetings. Promote walking meetings, taking the stairs, stand-up desks where feasible, and the recognition of employees who are making efforts to live healthier. Be consistent with any of these things and you'll establish a "wellness culture" and see it catch on throughout the organization.



Organizations have been experiencing many and rapid changes over recent decades - changes prompted by advances in technology, the pressure of economics, competition, mergers, reorganizations, and more. Helping employees cope has generated significant discussion among workforce management professionals. Change may be good, bad, easy, difficult, desired, or undesired, but, first and foremost, it's often perceived as a *threat*. Threat in this sense means it challenges the status quo and the familiar. When planning for change, develop a communication strategy that helps employees consider how they'll adapt, make decisions, consider the mental hurdles of acceptance, consider the reasons for change, and grow to appreciate how the change will ultimately be better for them. Your workgroup and organization can thrive with positive change, but without communication and patience, many problems could sabotage your organization's goals.

Frontline Supervisor

Questions



I referred my employee to the EAP a year ago, but their recommendations weren't followed at the time. My employee is in trouble with severe absenteeism issues, and has just returned to the EAP. Should I go forward with the job actions we've planned or hold off?



I hear a lot about stress management techniques, but frankly, none of them work for me. What can a supervisor in my position do? I feel I'm about one inch away from burnout. I could call the EAP, but doesn't that just mean more stress management techniques?



I'm a newly hired supervisor and would like to build trust with my employees quickly. Can you offer any tips?

Answers



Put your organization's interests first and make a decision based upon the circumstances. You may decide this means waiting to see what outcome is achieved after your formal referral to the EAP. Failure to seek counseling or EAP help when problems first surface and later seeking help under duress is quite common, especially with employees wrestling with severe behavioral-health problems. Although frustrating to management, this flight to help is usually viewed by EAPs as a positive sign and an indication that the end of a cycle of denial and failed attempts at self-control of symptoms is at hand. You can reinforce your employee's motivation to alter behaviors with an agreement to postpone administrative action in exchange for full compliance with detailed behavioral changes, changes the EAP can facilitate. Work closely with your management, HR advisor, and the EAP to craft this agreement.



Managing stress isn't just about practicing exercises to reduce its effect. Working with the EAP will allow you to develop a plan or approach to manage the unique stressors you face. You'll examine specific behaviors that impede your ability to manage stress or that make it worse, and be introduced to other behaviors designed to intervene. Anyone who faces stress copes with it somehow, sometimes with harmful or maladaptive reactions to circumstances. These behaviors may include overwork, denial of the stress, increased multitasking, or avoiding discussing problems, to name a few. With the EAP, you'll learn to pull back the issues like peeling an onion, and discover new, healthier, and adaptive behaviors that will help you to manage stress effectively.



You can't rush trust, but here are a few tips to prevent setbacks: 1) Do what you say you're going to do. Employees have memories like elephants for promises made by supervisors; 2) Communicate frequently, not just when there's big news, good or bad. Communication is the only way employees will discover what you want them to know about you, so the more frequent, the better; 3) Be appropriate with employees, but avoid being reserved, aloof, remote, or a conformist. Let them see the real you, and use opportunities like birthdays or special occasions to express your sentiments to individuals; 4) When possible, don't harbor negative news and then drop it on employees at "the right time." Try to first prepare employees for what might be coming; 5) The more employees see and talk with you individually and in groups, the more trust will build.